Antelope Springs
Blended Families Parenting
Session 1

“The greatest use of a life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.”

William James

I. Stepfamilies are different; (at least 70 major differences, Lintemans book, pg 103)

a. Born of loss
b. Kids have lost control, contact and continuity (the 3 C’s)
c. Biological parent has lost status and stability
d. Long held marriage dream shattered
e. Nonresidential parent usually feels guilt, ostracized, like a leper
f. Children move between 2 homes
g. Previous parent-child relationships
h. Different family backgrounds “thrown together”
i. Lack of legal relationships “you aren’t my mother!!”

“The forces pulling on families are just too strong in the modern world. Ultimately we must decide either to steer or to go where the river takes us. The KEY to successful steering is to be intentional in family rituals.”

William J. Doherty Ph.D

II. Examining expectations;

a. Roles: How will you each relate to the stepchildren? Rights? Obligations? Discipline?
b. Rules and responsibilities: Chores? Enforcement? Who takes kids to dentist, etc?
d. Relationship with nonresidential parent: Issues to resolve? Involvement? Coparent?
e. Possible custody changes: Children living with ex? Spouses children with you?
g. Love and remarriage: Mourning completed? Feelings of failure? Expectations?
h. Children and stepchildren: How should they get along? Baby?

“Contrary to myth, stepfamilies have a high rate of success in raising healthy children. Eighty percent of the kids come out fine. The biggest source of problems for kids in stepfamilies is parental conflict leftover from the first marriage.”

Mavis Hetherington Ph.D

III. Myths;

a. Stepfamilies should work like nuclear families
b. Stepparents are cruel and insensitive
c. Blended families are created instantly
d. All blended family members should and will love each other
e. Blended families formed after a death have less problems than after a divorce
“Study after study shows that divorce and remarriage do not harm children, parental conflict does.”
(Emery Ph.D & Forehand Ph.D divorce research review)

IV. Reaching for Reality
a. Letting go of the past
b. Saying goodbye
c. Emotional divorce
d. Dealing with feelings
   1. anger; is always a MASK for FEAR, this can often help in understanding what is going on. Also anger toward an ex usually means that you haven’t emotionally divorced.
   2. guilt; what did you “do wrong”? guilt and shame are different animals.
   3. fear(s)
e. Steps to letting go;
   1. Recognize the feeling
   2. Express the feeling
   3. Clarify the feeling
   4. Explain the feeling
   5. Accept the feeling

V. Getting Help
a. Church
b. Therapists/counselors/social workers, etc.
c. School
d. Legal counsel
e. Media, especially good Internet sites.

Do you have an emotional divorce? Questions to ponder
1. I think of my former spouse only occasionally now.
2. I no longer become upset when I have to deal with my former spouse.
3. I have stopped trying to please my former spouse.
4. I no longer seek excuses to talk to my former spouse.
5. I rarely talk about my former spouse to my friends.
6. I have accepted that we are NOT getting back together.
7. My feelings of romantic love are gone.
8. My emotional commitment to my former spouse is over.
9. I can accept my former spouse having a love relationship with another person.
10. I am no longer angry with my former spouse.
“Strengthening the Couple Relationship”

“The strength of the couple relationship is the key to success in blended families, without a strong foundation in the marriage the transitions for the family can become almost nightmarish. Conversely when the couple relationship is fundamentally effective and committed, the renegotiation that must consistently take place can occur within a framework of respect and cohesiveness.”

1. Integrating the Past with the Present
   a. Reality reigns . . . ex spouses
   b. Coming to terms with the past
      1. Explore and express fears
      2. Look at Family of Origin (this is crucial)

(Making Peace with Your Parents by Bloomingfield & Fender)

   3. When a former mate won’t let go . . . change YOUR response

2. Living in the Present
   a. Money matters. . . one pot or two?
   b. Living arrangements . . yours or mine?
   c. Yours, Mine and Ours? (not just kids, but objects)
   d. The Discipline Dilemma (who is charge?)
   e. The Couple Relationship (building Interdependence and Intimacy)
   f. Expectations
   g. Communication
   h. Conflict resolution
   i. Taking time to grow
   j. Personal growth taking time for yourself

3. What’s Special about Your Relationship
   a. Focus on strengths (list and post) use marriage strategy meeting
   b. Reframe, Reinforce and validate understand REFRAMING and use it
   c. Know the difference between Praise and Encouragement
   d. ENCOURAGE, ENCOURAGE, ENCOURAGE!!!!
   e. read “The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work” by John Gottman
      and DO the exercises diligently!!

The Secrets to Stepfamily Success by Lintermans
Strengthening Your Stepfamily by Einstein and Albert
Blending Families by Shimberg
The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work by Gottman
Helping Kids Cope With Divorce the Sandcastles Way by Neuman & Romanowski
Children Learn What They Live
By Dorothy Law Nolte, Ph.D.

If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn.
If children live with hostility, they learn to fight.
If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive.
If children live with pity, they learn to feel sorry for themselves.
If children live with ridicule, they learn to feel shy.
If children live with jealousy, they learn to feel envy.
If children live with shame, they learn to feel guilty.
If children live with encouragement, they learn confidence.
If children live with tolerance, they learn patience.
If children live with praise, they learn appreciation.
If children live with acceptance, they learn to love.
If children live with approval, they learn to like themselves.
If children live with recognition, they learn it is good to have a goal.
If children live with sharing, they learn generosity.
If children live with honesty, they learn truthfulness.
If children live with fairness, they learn justice.
If children live with kindness and consideration, they learn respect.
If children live with security, they learn to have faith in themselves and in those about them.
If children live with friendliness, they learn the world is a nice place in which to live.